Keeping House: A novel and novel companion

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Abstract

The creative work of this study is a novel-length work of literary fiction called *Keeping House* (published as *Grace's Table*, by University of Queensland Press, April 2014).

Grace has not had twelve people at her table for a long time. Hers isn't the kind of family who share regular Sunday meals. As Grace prepares the feast, she reflects on her life, her marriage and her friendships. When the three generations of her family come together, simmering tensions from the past threaten to boil over. The one thing that no one can talk about is the one thing that no one can forget.

Grace's Table is a moving and often funny novel using food as a language to explore the power of memory and the family rituals that define us.

The exegetical component of this study does not adhere to traditional research pedagogies. Instead, it follows the model of what the literature describes as fictocriticism. It is the intention that the exegesis be read as a hybrid genre; one that combines creative practice and theory and blurs the boundaries between philosophy and fiction. In offering itself as an alternative to the exegetical canon it provides a model for the multiplicity of knowledge production suited to the discipline of practice-led research.

The exegesis mirrors structural elements of the creative work by inviting twelve guests into the domestic space of the novel to share a meal. The guests, chosen for their diverse thinking, enable examination of the various agents of power involved in the delivery of food. Their ideas cross genders, ages and time periods; their motivations and opinions often collide. Some are more concerned with the spatial politics of where food is

consumed, others with its actual preparation and consumption. Each, however, provides a series of creative reflective conversations throughout the meal which help to answer the research question: How can disempowered women take authority within their domestic space?

Michel de Certeau must defend his "operational tactics" or "art of the weak" [1] as a means by which women can subvert the colonisation of their domestic space against Michel Foucault's ideas about the functions of a "disciplinary apparatus". [2] Erving Goffman argues that the success of de Certeau's "tactics" depends upon his theories of "performance" and "masquerade" [3]; a claim de Certeau refutes. Doreen Massey and the author combine forces in arguing for space, time and politics to be seen as interconnected, non-static and often contested. The author calls for identity, or sense of self, to be considered a further dimension which impacts on the function of spatial models. Yu-Fi Tuan speaks of the intimacy of kitchens; Gaston Bachelard the power of daydreams; and Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin gives the reader a taste of the nourishing arts. Roland Barthes forces the author to reconsider her function as a writer and her understanding of the reader's relationship with a text.

Fictional characters from two texts have a place at the table – Marian from *The Edible Woman* by Margaret Atwood [4] and Lilian from *Lilian's Story* by Kate Grenville. [5] Each explores how they successfully subverted expectations of their gender.

The author interprets and applies elements of the conversations to support Grace's tactics in the novel as well as those related to her own creative research practice. Grace serves her guests, reflecting on what is said and how it relates to her story. Over coffee, the two come together to examine what each has learned.

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Statement of original authorship

The work contained in this thesis is my own and has not been previously submitted to meet the requirements for any award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: _____

Sally Lynn Piper

Date: _____

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A novel companion: how to wage war in the kitchen using food, guerrilla tactics and a sharp knife.

by Sally Piper

“it would probably not be worth the trouble of making books if they failed to teach the author something he hadn’t known before, if they didn’t lead to unforeseen places, and if they didn’t disperse one toward a strange and new relation with himself. The pain and pleasure of the book is to be an experience.” [6]

Starters

The author stood beside Michel de Certeau – her muse and guiding light these past few years – while the other Michel spoke.

'Most of us start our research with a curiosity,' Foucault said, 'a doubt; a niggling need for an answer to something that sits, initially, at the backs of our minds, but which eventually presses itself so firmly on our consciousness that we are driven to answer it.'

The author nodded. She liked Foucault's ideas about the function of the author much more than those about the dominated in *Discipline and Punish*. [7] The dominated was what she was most interested in.

'I suppose as creative writer *and* researcher I'm in a fortunate position,' the author said. 'I have a way in which I can express those curiosities and doubts and, in fiction at least, one that might resonate with the everyman, or woman.'

'And the *every*man and woman are vital to our practice of everyday life, are they not, Foucault?' de Certeau said.

The author, sensing this may not be the time for de Certeau to confront Foucault cut across the two philosophers. 'And today I feel even more fortunate because I have the opportunity to test my question against all these critical minds.' The author raised her glass of spritzer to the twelve people who filled Grace's kitchen. They were people chosen from a long list, eventually narrowed to those voices most able to help her understand the mechanisms of power operating within a kitchen.

'So what question do you pose for us?' Foucault asked the author.

Now that the request was out there the author felt hard-pressed to make her answer worthy of a notable philosopher's time. Fleetingly, she feared it would be construed as just another rant, a small female voice amidst the booming thunder of male academia.

But Foucault was right, a curiosity *had* grown within her consciousness, seeds of thought planted there by reading too much twentieth century (and earlier) literature; stories in which women always seemed subordinated to men. [8-11] She could find no record that this subordination was the result of some historical event or social change; it was not something that had *occurred*. Rather, it seemed to be a role which had simply been passed down from one generation to the next.

But need it be, always? she wondered.

Simone de Beauvoir had given the author a new lens through which to view this notion of historical female subordination when she said, "[i]f woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change". [12]

Was the author to assume then, that unless they revolted, women only gained what men were willing to give them, that they took nothing, only received? Surely there were stories of women who had successfully *taken back* their authority? And if there were, how had they achieved it?

It took time, but the author eventually found stories in which the female characters refused to wait for authority to be given to them. There were two women in particular who *took* it, often did it in cunning and clever ways. But she'd leave that for Lilian and Marian to tell.

For now she must answer Foucault.

'My question,' the author said, too loudly because all in the room turned and looked at her. She started again. 'My question asks how can disempowered women take authority within their domestic space. I believe my novel provides an answer.'

Doreen Massey, standing with Yi-Fu Tuan and Gaston Bachelard, said, 'The *domestic* space – how exciting. Often maligned unfortunately, but I consider it an interesting site for the study of gendered geography.'

'And provides a great stage for a performance,' Goffman added.

'Not *performance*, Erving,' de Certeau said, 'It is the clever *tactics* which ensure success.'

The author placed a hand on de Certeau's arm and squeezed. 'Not now,' she said.

Bachelard was nodding enthusiastically. 'And there is much poetry to be found in the domestic,' he said. 'In its drawers, its corners, the daydreams it has protected. One only need look about them.'

'And they would find good food too, I would hope. Oh, I do love the nourishing arts.' Brillat-Savarin ran a soft-skinned hand round the general vicinity of his stomach.

'And some food not so good for you,' Grace added.

Roland Barthes, more concerned with the art of writing than that of the domestic realm, said to the author, 'So what came first – the answer or the question?'

The author thought this a valid enquiry. Her research and practice had wrestled with one another early on, each trying to claim supremacy over the other like two children caught in a game of thumb wars.

‘In the end, neither,’ she told Barthes. ‘Each had to work together – informing supporting, nurturing.’

‘Like partners in a marriage,’ offered Marian, Margaret Atwood’s once fragile and edible woman. ‘Not that mine would have turned out like that, as it happens.’

Grace snorted. ‘Nor mine.’

‘I have never known marriage.’ Lilian, the feisty creation of Kate Grenville, sounded more relieved than jilted. ‘But “Be not afeard”, [13] as my dear William would say, for I *have* known love,’ she said and cast a knowing look round those in the room.

The excitable babble that followed sounded like the minutes prior to the curtain opening at a theatre. The author listened to the hum, picked up odd words: discipline, guerrilla tactics, politics, space. She started piecing them together in her mind to form the foundations of a coherent whole.

Main Course

The space in which these twelve people stood was a contested one. A war had raged in this room for many years, much of it silent. The main combatants in the battle were Grace and Des.

Grace supposed that, historically, wars were considered in global or regional terms; bitter and bloody campaigns fought within political or cultural contexts. And yet Doreen Massey, the social geographer, would support the author's argument that such battles could also occur within the domestic space. And de Certeau would recognise them as small, intimate campaigns cunningly executed through the use of guerrilla tactics.

Grace finished arranging the hors d'oeuvres on the fine white china plate, then made her way across the room to where de Certeau and Foucault stood talking. They were both so intent on their conversation that they didn't notice Grace place the plate between them.

'Come now, Foucault,' de Certeau said, 'Grace's story isn't about her obeying some "internalised logic". Her actions were about "subtle movements of escape and evasion". [14] At its core her story is about defeating the coloniser. Empowerment. Tactical opportunities she "seized on the wing", as it were.' [15]

'But, de Certeau, to suggest people are capable of such tactics – this "art of the weak" [16] that you speak of – means there is the potential for war in the practice of everyday life for any one of us.'

'Indeed, that *is* what I suggest. But if you'll allow me to quote Fry, one of Grace's compatriots, you might better understand my meaning. He says "While every war is not a

world war, every war is a war of worlds". [17] And this –' de Certeau tapped the cover of Grace's story, 'this is Grace's world…Grace's war. It just happens to occur in her kitchen.'

Grace moved on from the two scholars, hors d'oeuvres overlooked, pondering the consequences of such a war. Should she feel guilty? she wondered, because she didn't. Regret? No, not that either. All she felt was frustration at the circumstances of history which prescribed she be dominated by Des, and thereby caused the need for their war to begin with. But history had also assigned her the task of cooking and as such, Grace thought with some irony, she'd also been provided with a fine weapon to balance an injustice.

As Grace prepared the meal that day, she had thought about those domestic rituals which surrounded "doing-cooking" [18] as de Certeau said his friend and colleague, Luce Giard, liked to call it. She had made it sound so complex, Grace thought, so *important*, calling it an "art", executed according to the cook's repertoire of preferences and routines, dreams and phobias, prejudices and customs. [19] Others had said there was a language around the preparation and consumption of food [20-22]; a system of coded messages through which society could reveal something of its structure. Grace thought it should also be said that food revealed something of the coded messages which structure a family.

While polishing the cutlery for Grace earlier, the author had said that the tasks they were doing – Grace was trimming the excess fat from the leg of lamb at the time – were said to be maligned as trivial and limiting, especially in literary works. [23] The author said she didn't hold to that belief herself, of course, because while it might be understood

that there was an authorised way of preparing and consuming food, she thought it an authority that could easily be violated.

Grace had paused for thought over her fat trimming and looked down at the plump leg. Once, she'd studied a joint and determined whether it was a task she needed to do or not. Later, she neither paused nor considered but simply dropped the joint in the baking dish and slid it into the oven, knowing who would demand the first fatty slice.

'They're wrong,' Grace had said to the author. 'These tasks can make women powerful, which is neither trivial nor limiting.'

Grace thought back to the three square meals she provided every day of her married life; routine acts which displayed all the signs of someone who cared. And so long as those meals appeared on time and comprised those foods Des liked or demanded, then he didn't question the ritual, because while the meals kept coming to the table he believed his house was in Order. And it was a state of Order Grace thought of with a capital O; a powerful noun. But just as powerful, as it turned out, was Chaos – capital C – because it represented the opposite to control; something Des feared losing and which, unknowingly, he did. Unknowingly, because Grace kept up her cooking rituals – extended them in fact after Claire's death, unquestioned – so that there was a *perceived* Order while all the time it was really Chaos which reigned in her kitchen.

The author was finding it difficult to follow the thread of Roland Barthes's conversation. She felt the cogs of understanding groan under the weight of his talk of author death,

allegories and the "multiplicity of writing". [24] She wished Marion were there to translate; she understood him. 'Do you know Marion – Marion Halligan?' the author asked.

'Not personally, but I do believe we share a common love for Paris, literature and language.'

'She says you believe "literature is language. That the form is the substance", not just some "instrument to convey a meaning, an idea, a fact, a truth: what it means is itself".' [25]

Barthes looked pleased so the author continued.

'She also says that you think there is "a duality of language and gastronomy", [26] that words are taken on the tongue and tasted for meaning by the reader.'

'She has a way with words, your Marion. Indeed, I do believe it is the author's job to "*nourish* the book, which is to say he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it".' [27]

The author couldn't agree more. She'd suffered it, lived it, for what seemed more like ten years than three.

'But afterwards,' Barthes continued, 'the author must be absent from the reading, he…*she,*' he saluted his wine glass at the author, 'can no longer make any claim on its origins. Only the language can do that, as the reader tastes it for themselves.'

'But not all readers have the same taste buds. How will I know if they understand what I mean to say?'

'Once written, your meaning is no longer important. The reader will taste what they want.'

I write it then I'm redundant. That hurts.

Barthes sensed the author's disappointment. 'But that's part of the fun,' he cajoled. 'It can become anything – anything at all, once it has left your hands.'

'But I want my readers to know *Grace's* truth, not some version of it.'

Barthes shooed the suggestion away. 'Only a positivist would legislate one version of the truth. [28] It is a hangover from hegemonic theory which gives little consideration for the multiple truths that might come from the imagination. Pierre Macherey says "the book must be incomplete" because if "it has not said everything, there remains the possibility of saying something else".' [29]

'So there should always be absences?'

'And silences, if you follow Macherey's thinking. Because "speech eventually has nothing more to tell us: we investigate the silence". [30] Often it is this which gives the work life.'

The author looked to the floor, thoughtful. Finally, she thought she might be getting it. Her reader was to sit with her book as though it was a plate of food. They must taste the words of each sentence; know the flavours in some cases, analyse in others, guided by what they had tasted in the past.

The author looked up at Barthes again. 'What if the reader doesn't like what I'm feeding them?'

Not for the first time, the author thought of the domesticity of Grace's story, this analysis of a woman's life undertaken almost exclusively by the acts she performed in her kitchen.

Barthes shrugged. 'Some like offal, others caviar. But not all people like both.'

‘Caviar? Did someone mention caviar?’ Brillat-Savarin had made his way across the room to Barthes, topping up wine glasses for Grace along the way and sampling dips and breads he’d not tasted before. ‘That is what these need – a good smattering of plump beluga.’ He held up one of Grace’s smoked salmon hors d’oeuvres before slipping it between lips as pink as the salmon.

‘I’m not sure beluga is available anymore, my friend.’

‘Not available? Why ever not?’

‘The sturgeon, I’m afraid, is at risk of going the way of the dodo.’

Brillat-Savarin looked troubled. ‘Surely not?’

Barthes nodded gravely.

‘Do you like offal equally well as caviar, Anthelme?’ the author asked.

‘Depends on how it is cooked, my dear. Some in the kitchen massacre those tender organs. Cooks more gifted provide a fitting tribute to the previous vital function of such delectable viands.’

The author liked the word *delectable*. It was a word which could describe pleasure as much as it could displeasure. Grace’s cakes and desserts were delectable.

‘Now, Barthes,’ Brillat-Savarin said, ‘I hear you think me something of a neologist.’

The author was left to think about how times and tastes change. The key, she decided, was to approach the domestic in a way that resonated with that difference. She hoped she’d brought a new understanding – a new flavour – to the reading.

Tuan, Massey and Bachelard stood together in the middle of the room.

'Grace shows her guests much kindness,' Tuan said, watching her.

Massey and Bachelard turned in unison to look at Grace as she moved on from de Certeau and Foucault with her plate of hors d'oeuvres.

Noticing, Grace turned quickly from their sudden gaze.

Gaston Bachelard, left to look at Grace's back, focussed, instead, on the corners, the cupboards, the miniature details of this room of Grace's: her kitchen. Just as the poet could "write a room" he too believed a reader could "read a room". [31] And he suspected much could be learnt about the lives of those who had lived within this space.

Take the chair at the kitchen table he knew to be Des's. The timber seat was worn more than any of the others, the varnish completely gone in parts, exposing the blondeness of the grain beneath.

The longer one spends sitting in this space, Bachelard thought, the more likely it is that he finds himself cast a key role in the daydreams the room sheltered. He thought it a brave or stupid man who wouldn't suspect this and vacate his seat sooner. Or maybe such obstinacy was the sign of a man blinded by his own comfortable certainty of the authority he held in his home.

Daydreams interested Bachelard as much as poetics. He knew them to be the places where "passions simmer and re-simmer in solitude"; a place where "explosions" and "exploits" can be prepared. [32] Passion and solitude were things he suspected Grace had once held in abundance.

‘Grace – come join us,’ Yi-Fu Tuan called. He had been discomfited by her startled look, believing the home to be a place where one should feel secure not threatened. [33]

Grace joined the trio.

‘I have watched you today,’ Tuan said.

‘I’ve noticed.’

Tuan smiled. ‘Our scrutiny was well-intentioned.’

Grace shrugged and waited for the elderly human geographer to continue.

‘I couldn’t help but notice you sometimes look to carry the weight of this house upon your shoulders.’

‘Only its kitchen,’ Grace said.

‘Ah, kitchens,’ Tuan’s eyebrows lifted with interest. ‘To some an ordinary space, but to me no less intimate than any other room in the home.’

‘You don’t find kitchens boring then – all steam and hot air?’ Grace asked.

‘On the contrary. On the surface it might appear a boring room with none of the dramas found in, say, a bedroom. But that’s because the dramas of a kitchen are not so “dressed up” so tend to escape our attention. But all the while “seeds of lasting sentiment are being planted” [34] in this room. Ask Gaston. I’m sure he would agree.’

Grace turned to Gaston Bachelard.

‘Your life is written across its every surface,’ he said, hands open to her.

Grace was thoughtful, looked to her plate of smoked salmon blinis. ‘I tried to read the grain of the table with my fingertips once, as if it were Braille and could tell me the

room's story – the stories of who'd lived here.' She felt a fool admitting it, but nobody laughed.

'You see,' Tuan said, 'hardly a boring room at all in which one believes they can do that.'

Grace turned to Doreen Massey. 'And what about you, Doreen – what do you make of my kitchen?'

Massey, no stranger to exposing the differential power relations of a space, considered the breadth and depth of Grace's sizeable kitchen before she answered. 'It is not just the room in which you cooked or people ate,' she said. 'To me it also represents the site of a "meaningful politics".' [35]

'Politics?' Grace asked. 'Where's the politics in being a housewife?'

'Women's confinement to the domestic sphere for the purpose of performing housewifely acts not only controls their spatial existence but also their social identity,' [36] Massey said. 'In short, a woman's life – *your* life, Grace – was defined by the needs of your family and husband. Create a situation where one sex defines the existence of another and you're faced with a political doctrine.'

'But one which can be subverted.'

Massey and Grace turned to look at the author. She had joined the group on the pretence of taking one of the smoked salmon-topped blinis from Grace's plate, but her hunger was more about the conversation.

'Yes,' Massey said. 'Unless she subverts it, and in so doing creates a new spatial model in which to exist. But any new model should be shown the courtesy of

examination.' Massey levelled this statement at the author. 'The word *space*, I find, is much-used but poorly defined these days, [37] worn like a loose blouse; one size fits all.'

The author was grateful for the slow chewing needed to eat smoked salmon. She swallowed once, then twice before she was able to collect an answer in her mind. 'You raise a valid point, Doreen. The way I see it is that Grace's original spatial model was one defined by the inequality of gender relations of the time, where men were the breadwinners, women the bread-makers. Traditions and learned behaviour played a role in determining that model early on – what had occurred before, what Grace had learnt from her mother, what Des had learnt from his father. But this changed.'

'You don't hold to the belief that space and time are static then?' Massey asked.

'No at all. To me space, place, time, politics – they're all interconnected, but their interconnectedness is unfixed and often contested, therefore can't be static.'

'There are those who would disagree,' Massey said. 'Laclau, Jameson [38-39] – each provides strong arguments that space and time are opposed and that the spatial is devoid of politics.'

The author shrugged. 'To believe that is to think of space as a flat surface and time as a mere slice of the now with little regard for what had occurred before and what might occur in the future. And to deny the spatial a political dimension – well that only closes the eyes and mind to the existence of fights about spatialised power and the opportunities some might seize in order to shift it.'

The author thought Massey looked pleased with her examination so far, so she continued. 'But I think something else also needs to be built into the spatial model other than space, time and politics.'

‘And what would that be?’ Massey asked.

‘Identity, or the sense of self. Because how an individual conducts themselves within their spatial model impacts on the function of it.’

‘Something equally unfixed and contested then?’ Massey asked.

‘Absolutely. Our early sense of self is an identity that is imposed on us by another, say, in Grace’s case her mother early on then later by Des, and is therefore invalid. Grace proves this when she applies a new identity – a new sense of self – to her domestic role after Claire died. Despite Des wanting her to grieve in a certain way, an *easier* way – for him anyway – Grace expressed her grief in a way that allowed her to take back the power in her relationship and redeem Claire’s death. In rewriting the function of her domestic space she rejected Des’s Order and with that brought a political edge to the kitchen. So space, time, politics, identity – they’re all interconnected and never static.’

‘You see,’ Tuan said to Grace, ‘kitchens are never boring.’

That morning, as Grace had gone to peel an onion for the gravy stock, she’d wondered if hers was simply the story of a disgruntled housewife; the lament of a woman trapped in an era of feminine discontent. She’d paused with her knife over the vegetable and instead of cutting had posed questions into the nowhere.

What is my story about, what’s at its core? How do I find out? How do I tell it?

This onion beneath her knife had a core too; a succulent centre. But it was buried deep at the heart of the vegetable.

I need to peel my story, Grace had decided then, *layer upon layer. I need to reach its heart*.

But how would she read each of those layers, even if she held them up to the bright light of scrutiny? Would she know what the markings on their surface meant? Would she be able to interpret them? What knowledge could she possibly gain that was worth sharing? After all, she was just a housewife, a cook, a wife, a mother.

But now she'd seen and understood some of those markings, and she liked what they told her: that domestic rituals could be used to liberate women; that there was the possibility of a politics to being a housewife. Who would have thought there was all that to keeping a house.

De Certeau had left the company of Foucault, and took up step as seat with Erving Goffman at the kitchen's back door. The two men passed Grace's story between them, leafed through the pages of the book, read from it, gestured.

'Her actions – her repertoire – of what – *how* – she cooked, they all support much of what I say.' De Certeau flicked the back of his hand against the cover of the book. 'Look, here.' He fanned the pages to find the one he wanted, stopped and stabbed his finger at a spot on page eighty-four. 'Two sugars. *Two* sugars. And him always believing it to be one. And just before, same page, she lies to Peter about there being any food left to make him a greasy fry-up like his father's.' De Certeau looked at Goffman and shrugged. 'But what else could she do, given the Order under which she operated? Needs demanded she cleave herself into different kinds of people in certain situations. "Social

abstraction" [40] I call it – no longer a whole but a fragmentation of the self. Yet all the while she appears to be simply doing her usual job.' De Certeau slapped the book closed.

'Kitchen as theatre,' Goffman said. 'And Grace the star actor in the performance.'

'It was not just performance, Erving,' de Certeau said. 'To think that suggests Grace was restricted to following some pre-written script. That is far too prescriptive – *and* too logical – not to mention denies the "spontaneous inventiveness of ordinary men and women". [41]

'But, Michel, consider this. While some performers are "sincere" in their belief they are staging a "real reality" of their everyday life, there are those who present a "masquerade" – a different reality – in order to delude their audience. [42] Such a masquerade is no different from your claim people adopt clever tactics to "disguise or transform themselves" like the "age-old ruses of fishes and insects" [43] in order to survive, or resist control at the very least. A performer is no less of a chameleon,' Goffman said. 'Even Grace admits as much in chapter six when she talks about the masks people wear, her own included.'

De Certeau wasn't convinced. 'Her actions were more tactic than mask,' he said. 'Masks are like sunglasses in a pocket – taken out and logically applied as required. But not tactics, they have no place of their own – no pocket. Their use does not depend on planning. They "operate in isolated actions, blow by blow". [44] Time is their accomplice, the user always looking for cracks in surveillance in order to seize opportunities to act. Take that mask Grace said she wore to hide the joy she felt at the power of the sugar spoon. [45] That is nothing compared to the tactical act of finding opportunities to load the spoon with the sugar, undetected, in the first place, and to go on loading it, for years.'

‘Still,’ Goffman said, ‘I believe a level of performance is required for your tactician to remain covert in their actions. Because had Grace not successfully presented the role of caring family provider first – that is *performed* in a certain way in order to delude her audience – then she would not have been successful in her guerrilla tactics which contradicted this role. Have you considered, Michel, that performance and tactic, by necessity, are co-dependent?’

De Certeau sat quietly for a moment considering the possibility of the union of performance and tactic. Could Goffman have a point – did tactical operations stand a greater chance of success if the operator performed them within a predetermined and expected role?

He liked to think he had an open mind, but the way de Certeau saw it was that performance demanded one understands *how* they should or should not perform; there existed premeditation and rationality for its use. Tactical operations, on the other hand, being “seized on the wing”, had no such privilege. To be a successful tactical operator de Certeau thought one must “make (*bricolent*) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules”, [46] or, in other words, become “other” [47] within the dominant social order. These “countless ways of ‘making do’” [48] cannot be scripted because they are required to occur when least expected, like “pulling tricks” or securing “lucky hits in the framework of a [dominant] system”. [49]

‘Co-exist, yes, I suppose they do,’ de Certeau said to Goffman, ‘but in no way do I consider them co-dependent. If one were confined to performing in accordance with expectation – that is to follow a script – how then does one find ways of “making do” of

the opportunities to act as "other" as they present themselves? One has to be "[s]ly as a fox and twice as quick", [50] Erving, in order to be a successful tactician. Performance alone can not achieve it. But I do believe tactical operations can be successful with or without performance.'

'Neither performer *nor* tactician are always successful in their endeavours,' Goffman said.

'True, but I consider Grace a successful tactician. After all, Des – the dominant social order of her household – is no longer with us, and for well-executed tactical reasons. I would suggest that as performer she was less successful. Here, let me demonstrate.' De Certeau riffled through the pages of the book again. He stopped on page ninety. 'Here, Susan accuses Grace of allowing Des to develop a "dangerous habit" of wanting more on his plate. This demonstrates how Susan comes to recognise the paradox between the role she believed her mother should undertake and the one Grace actually performed. And on page ninety-four, Susan claims Des didn't know how to take responsibility for what he ate but that Grace "knew well enough". Grace's performance – that she provides for her family with a conscience – has been recognised as a deceit. But not Grace's tactical operations – keeping Des's cigarettes tin full [51], his salt bowl always full on the table [52], the refrigerator kept well-stocked with his home brew [53] – these acts are lost in the schema of her domestic function, not recognised as significant within the performance. And neither should they be with a successful tactician. Because to demand a tactician have a conscience denies their right to resistance, to act as "other". A chameleon never seeks permission to change its colours, Erving, it just does.'

Goffman looked disappointed. 'For a Jesuit you can be a hard man.'

De Certeau laughed. ‘In discipline only, Erving.’

‘We should all move through to the dining room now,’ Grace said. ‘The meal is ready.’

‘Why don’t we stay here, Grace,’ Bachelard said. ‘This is *your* room after all – the site of *your* daydreams.’

‘Yes, let’s stay in the kitchen,’ Tuan agreed.

‘But the table’s not set to eat here.’ Grace was thrown by the suggestion. The kitchen held a mixed bag of memories, not all of them good; it had often been a room unchecked by good manners and propriety. The more formal dining room had marked the site of better behaviour over the years.

‘That’s only a matter of *stage* props, Grace.’ Goffman gave de Certeau a playful nudge. ‘Any with arms as strong as their minds and a willingness to lift a table?’

Three of the strong minds considered their arms equally so: Lilian, de Certeau and Tuan followed Goffman from the kitchen. They came back soon after with Grace’s dining table, tipped on its side to fit through the kitchen doorway, and set it at the end of the kitchen table. The heights of the two didn’t quite match but Grace shrugged off the disorder and threw a tablecloth across the ridge.

There was much clattering of plates and cutlery and the scraping of extra chairs across the tiled floor as everyone pitched in to reset the table in the kitchen.

Grace watched this industry from at the stove where she stirred the gravy.

She had always thought her kitchen not generously sized, sometimes felt its four walls tight around her, enough to stop her breath. Today, though, it seemed a large space

despite having so many people and tables in it, and nowadays her breath came in deep, easy movements.

After the last of the dishes of steaming vegetables were positioned around the table, and gravy boat at either end, Grace instructed her guests on where they should sit then placed the roast lamb before Brillat-Savarin. 'Would you carve, please, Anthelme?'

Brillat-Savarin looked pleased. 'Grace, you honour me,' he said and took up Pa's well-sharpened knife. He executed the task with deft precision, putting to one side the first browned slice, declaring the meat tenderer closer the bone.

Once each was served, conversation shifted from polite *if you wouldn't mind passing* and *thank yous*, back to the purpose of the gathering.

'You make a grand claim in your *Physiologie du Goût*, Anthelme.'

Brillat-Savarin turned to Foucault, one eyebrow raised.

'"Tell me what thou eatest, and I will tell thee what thou art".' [54]

The stately epicure laughed. 'Indeed, and if I had received a penny for every time it has been quoted since then I would be a rich man.'

'So are you saying that what we eat does more than defines us, it *makes* us?' Marian asked Brillat-Savarin.

'With certainty.'

Those at the table were quiet, thoughtful. Marian and Lilian exchanged glances. They understood the *making* of a person through food only too well.

Foucault spoke again. 'It stands to reason then that the same could be said for what someone *feeds* another. That the operations we undertake in the kitchen can tell us

what, or who, we are capable of becoming, given the "disciplinary machinery" [55] under which we operate.'

De Certeau took up the charge. 'But we can become something other than what your disciplinary machinery says we must, Michel.'

'You make us sound polarised in our thinking,' Foucault said. 'But are we all that different? We both use the word *tactic* in our work – you in your text *The Practice of Everyday Life*, me in my *Discipline and Punish* – to describe the "meticulous, often minute, techniques" [56] used to conquer.'

De Certeau was shaking his head even before Foucault had finished speaking. 'But we contradict one another as to *who* we consider the conqueror to be. Where you focus on the tactics of the oppressor, I focus on those of the oppressed. You "regard punishment as a political tactic" – a "tactic of power" [57] – exercised by "disciplinary apparatuses" [58]; I regard tactical operations as a way of *liberating* the dominated. Put simply, it's your "'docile' bodies" [59] and minds versus my agents of free will.'

'We all operate within a disciplinary apparatus, Michel; that, unfortunately, is our "social reality",' [60] Foucault said. 'The reality is not that of liberation or free will and that is why we must continue to study the mechanics of power – that which seeks to "homogenise the entire social order". [61] To spend too much time on those rare opportunities a few might seize in order to achieve a doubtful freedom only shifts the debate from truth to dreams.'

'But your mechanics of power dictates people are "produced" – that they are "profoundly shaped by the social and institutional settings in which they find themselves". [62] Where does that schema allow for the inventiveness of individuals?'

‘As I said, the social reality is not that of free will or inventiveness.’

De Certeau, who had been looking to the heavens, said, ‘Thrift was right when he said “[i]n Foucault country it always seems to be raining”.’ [63]

Foucault laughed. ‘It is a deluge of practicality only, Michel.’

‘Where is the practicality in holding to the belief that the dominated are “thoroughly disciplined citizens with little capacity for independent action”? [64] To suggest people are susceptible to such complete colonisation underestimates the “creative and disruptive presence” [65] of the colonised to act as “other” within a system of power, the “antidiscipline”, [66] if you please. In short, Michel, you offer us nothing more than a “detective story about a substituted body” [67]; a story which fails to give credit or authority to *all* potential heroes and heroines, only the villains.’

Foucault rested back in his chair, intertwined his fingers behind his bare pate and smiled his broad smile at de Certeau.

De Certeau readjusted his glasses which had slipped in the excitement of the debate, before he added in a calm voice, ‘Philo describes you as a “maverick thinker”, someone determined to “evade the shackles of conventional reasoning”, preferring, instead, your words to be used as the “conduit [of] inspiration”. [68] I fear, Michel, that conduit is displaying symptoms of constipation.’

There was a general twitter of amusement around the table, and those who had paused in their eating to listen felt the tension ease and resumed cutting portions for their forks.

The author lifted her wine glass, sipped, was thoughtful. De Certeau and Foucault’s debate raised questions for her. She admired both philosophers – each had

served her well in her work – so to take sides with one would seem like a betrayal to the other. Fortunately, such a betrayal wasn't necessary; she knew Foucault not to be as pessimistic as de Certeau would have them believe.

It was Foucault she had to thank for helping place Des at one end of Grace's kitchen table – the "disciplinary apparatus"; the one who dictated the terms upon which Grace was to manage her domestic space and, fatally for Des, her grief. The author didn't deny such controlling mechanisms existed – not least of all in such a gendered space as a kitchen – but what she couldn't believe was that Grace must become the "docile body" Des – or Foucault – expected her to, someone who operated in a "rigorously prescribed manner". [69] And for that, the author had de Certeau to thank. It was he who had helped her position Grace at the other end of the table as the one who operated with "polymorphous flexibility", [70] adopting guerrilla tactics in the practice of her everyday life in order to overcome the colonisation of her domestic space by Des.

She considered de Certeau's earlier claim to Goffman that performance could co-exist with tactical operations but that he didn't believe the two were co-dependant. The author wondered what de Certeau would have to say about the success of tactical operations in the face of Foucault's argument for a homogenised social order – would he consider the tactical operator depended on such an order for success?

The author had her own thoughts about this and decided to voice them. 'I don't think anybody here denies the existence of those who seek to organise and control all social space and social existence, Foucault. And neither do I think there are any guarantees that de Certeau's tactical operations will always be successful against such systems of power.'

De Certeau nodded his agreement. ‘Unfortunately our author is right – there can be no guarantees. But we must also “remind ourselves that neither must we take people for fools”.’ [71]

‘Indeed,’ Grace said. ‘The fool is the one who underestimates the capabilities of the cook.’

‘Grace is right,’ the author said. ‘It is the very existence of the homogeneities and hegemonies that you speak of, Foucault, which enables de Certeau’s “other” to successfully strike within these pre-existing systems of power. It’s their assumption of superiority which provides the disempowered with the blanket under which they can successfully operate. Take Des for example, if he hadn’t had Foucault’s message of a homogenised social order firmly set in his mind then he might have recognised Grace’s capacity for change – her “social alterity” as Ahearne calls it. [72] But no, he stuck to his “Don’t forget who puts the meat on the table” [73] mentality. And it was this self-assured arrogance which stopped him from recognising that what should have been the “warm room” [74] of his home had become the war room.

‘Couldn’t Grace have just left him? That’s what I did with Peter – in the end anyway,’ Marian said.

‘But Marian, that’s because you still held some power to act within your relationship with Peter,’ the author said. ‘You were financially independent, had your own place to live, no children to care for. Grace had to find the power to act via other means.’

‘Can I just add,’ de Certeau said, ‘that while Grace might have stayed under the same roof as Des, making it appear on the surface that the colonisation of her domestic

space was complete and that she had accepted the terms of it, even, she was able, eventually, to reject it.'

'But how do you reject it without leaving it?' Marian asked.

'Consider this example,' de Certeau said. 'When the Spanish imposed their culture on the indigenous South American Indians, the Indians submitted to the subjection. But this was because the Indians "*made* of the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind". [75] Essentially, "they made something else out of them; they subverted them from within".' [76]

'Like Capoeira,' the author said. 'An art form practised by Afro-Brazilian slaves that combined elements of combat and dance. In this way they were able to practice their fighting skills under the disguise of traditional dance and drama.' [77-78]

'Exactly,' de Certeau said. 'They became "*other* within the very colonization that outwardly assimilated them [and in so doing] deflected its power, which they lacked the means to challenge". [79]

'In other words,' the author said, '"they escaped it without leaving it". [80] And what was the only thing Grace still had some control over in her home which she could use to subvert Des's imposed law? Her way of escaping without leaving?'

'Food,' Brillat-Savarin answered for the table.

'Or, more precisely,' de Certeau said, '"doing-cooking", which, as we've come to learn, is more than simply preparing a meal.'

Lilian nudged Brillat-Savarin seated beside her. 'I wonder what we can learn about the repertoire of *doing-eating*?'

Brillat-Savarin laughed. ‘That you, Lilian, enjoyed the nourishing arts more than any other.’

‘I think,’ the author said, ‘we would discover there is as much a language around the preparing of food as the consumption of it, a recognised and authorised way of doing both which can be violated but which can also be read for understanding.’

Marian had said little throughout the day but she’d listened to and thought about all that had been said – eavesdropping on Goffman’s ideas about performance, de Certeau’s talk of finding opportunities for liberation along with Foucault’s thoughts on domination. She tried to make sense of it all in relation to her own story; a 1960s “feminist social satire” [81] depicting alternatives for marriageable women. She’d known all of those situations – performance, domination, liberation – and each had required a few guerrilla tactics in order to secure her escape. And like Grace, she’d used food to manipulate the politics of her domestic space.

Looking at the now cold remains of roast lamb on her plate, Marian mused on how meat had been the first food she’d rejected from her diet. She could still see those dotted lines on a diagram of a planned cow, dissecting the unfortunate beast into unrecognisable pieces just as Peter had tried to dissect her into manageable chunks for his consumption: the hostess hock; the sirloin shopper; the cook cutlet, all ultimately packaged in the bloodied butcher wrap of a red dress. In the end, it hadn’t been difficult to reject this carving up of the self. All she’d had to do was close her mouth, and stomach, and refuse to swallow this symbol of the patriarchy.

‘Meat is treated as King. That’s what Carol Adams says in her book – *The Sexual Politics of Meat*.’ [82] Everyone turned to look at Marian’s end of the table. She continued, despite their gaze. ‘But I rejected that notion. And Grace did too – and Jorja, then Nick. But unlike me, Grace kept meat on her menu and made it work instead as one of her tactical pawns.’

‘Reject meat? What a thought,’ Brillat-Savarin said, bemused.

‘Have any of you read Marion Halligan’s account of geese whose webbed feet were nailed to the floor in order for them to be immobilised, force fed and fattened for their livers?’ [83]

Some at the table nodded. Brillat-Savarin raised his head and delivered his comment upwards, as though to God: ‘Foie gras – divine.’

‘Grace didn’t need hammer or nail to gain the upper hand in her relationship with Des,’ Marian continued, ‘because, as the author has already said, he was sufficiently confident of his domestic authority that he overlooked his similarity to the unfortunate goose.’

‘But what about you, Marian?’ Massey asked. ‘What was *your* hammer and nail? How did you escape?’

Marian didn’t answer straight away. She paused to consider the geography of her gender and decided that in the 1960s it was a confused landscape. She thought of the other women in her story – the “character foils” [84] – each of whom contributed to that confusion. There was Ainsley, the new wave feminist prepared to have a child out of wedlock; the landlady down below, looking out for instances of impropriety like a pre-feminist matriarch; the “office virgins”, the conformists always on the lookout for a

prospective husband; and Clara, the once ideal feminine figure reduced to an exhausted and disgruntled housewife. Somehow Marian had had to try and position her sense of self somewhere within this milieu of difference. No wonder her vulnerability had been exposed; she didn't fit into any of the boxes available to her at the time.

Marian thought of how she'd allowed herself to become the compliant and undemanding woman Peter expected her to be, someone who didn't object to sex in the "too small and uncomfortably hard and ridgey" [85] bath, who had to "adjust to his moods" [86] and demands, "scratching the back of his neck" [87] just as he liked. She remembered the dream where she had started to dissolve. [88] The real Marian had almost disappeared, absorbed by the expectations of Peter and her gender.

'I escaped by running initially,' she said to Massey. 'Like a rabbit.'

The start of Marian's escape began soon after her arrival at the Park Plaza bar with Peter where they were to meet Len and Ainsley. She remembered how she'd panicked upon realising Peter was more serious about their relationship than she'd originally believed, and she'd run from the bar, hunted on foot by Len, and by Peter in his car. Once caught, and in Len's apartment, she'd hidden "underground" beneath Len's sofa as though in a "private burrow". [89]

'I was the hunted; Peter the hunter,' she said. 'But Peter didn't need his "collection of weapons" his "wicked-looking knives" [90] to catch me. Instead, he accused me of "rejecting [my] femininity", [91] criticised my inability to fit into any of the boxes. That's why I accepted his marriage proposal – to prove him wrong.'

'Ah, so you'd hoped to *perform* as wife,' Goffman said.

'Yes, I suppose I thought I could act like the kind of wife Peter wanted.'

‘But a performance you failed to deliver,’ de Certeau said, ‘though you didn’t fail to deliver tactics – actions depicting you as the opposite of what Peter expected from a wife. Cleaning, cooking, eating – domestic roles Peter wanted performed par excellence – all of them stopped eventually.’

Marian laughed. ‘Dare I say, I even started to enjoy the disorder and chaos that my slovenliness came to signify. It wouldn’t have done at Peter’s apartment.’

‘The apartment under *construction*,’ Massey said, wryly. ‘Just waiting for you to move in and its construction would have been complete.’

‘But you escaped Peter’s attempts at colonising your life in other ways too, didn’t you, Marian,’ de Certeau looked at Marian as though a prized student.

‘Indeed I did. I lived a second, contradictory and secret life with the unlikely Duncan, my friend from the Laundromat. You’d have liked him, Lil – he could quote Shakespeare almost as well as you.’

Lilian beamed. ‘Everyone loves dear William.’

‘It was a cunning ploy to seek “otherness”,’ de Certeau said. ‘Duncan was the *un* of everything about Peter: *un*domesticated, *un*ambitious, *un*conforming. A relationship as much about Duncan proving he could be conventional as you proving you didn’t have to be. He completed your detachment from Peter.’

‘Which is why I could eat the cake I’d made at the end,’ Marian said. ‘I wasn’t “rejecting [my] femininity” [92] as Ainsley accused me of as well, but demonstrating that I could detach myself from the women Peter expected me to be and the one I wanted to be. I became the consumer, not the consumed.’

‘I was too large to be consumed, though Father tried.’ With elbow on table, Lilian crooked a chubby index finger under her chin and looked thoughtful for a moment. ‘And in many ways I suppose it could be said that I rejected my femininity,’ she said, ‘or the one that people had mapped out for me anyway. I am happy to admit it.’

Lilian looked down to the scarce remains on her plate. The lamb had been delicious, for Grace was a good cook, but even now meat still reminded her of Albion. Meal after meal, she had watched him slash at it with his sharp knife, always taking the lion’s share, gobbling down mouthfuls before spouting off his facts. Meat might be king as Marian had said, but at Lilian’s childhood dinner table she had once believed Father to be king. Not any more.

‘No pretence or performance for you then?’ de Certeau asked. ‘The Lilian we see before us today is the real Lilian. Your obesity provides your identity.’

Lilian’s face took on a rare serious look. ‘I remember whispering to myself in bed one night “I am a fat girl” [93] and I did not mind because I had found a way of escaping what awaited me. I could have acted another identity, had I chosen. But to do that would have led to a frightening future; one resembling my friend Ursula’s, “a person who did not have to console herself with the thought of her brains”. [94] I chose, instead, to be fat and clever rather than a “mediocre pretty girl”.’ [95] Lilian paused a moment, then added, ‘I was much “too arrogant to be mediocre”, [96] though it is what Father would have preferred.’

‘So in your largeness you found a way of escaping without leaving,’ de Certeau said.

‘And brought a new understanding to what constitutes a political body,’ Massey added. ‘Your obesity became your bulwark against Albion’s authority.’

Lilian was pleased with these two analyses. She placed a hand on each of her generous sides and patted. ‘Yes, I was more dangerous to him this way – a threat to his Order. But as William would say, “virtue and cunning were endowments greater”, [97] and “no one was more cunning then I”,’ [98] she said triumphantly. ‘For I allowed myself to grow fat in devious ways – I would whine and pester Alma in the kitchen, steal from the pantry, bully Mother with my requests for food till she kept the chocolate box filled for the sake of quiet. I did “not let a single crumb escape for the ants” [99] when I hid under the plumbago tree. I nurtured my expanding flesh like a mother nurtures a child. My largeness became a reminder to thin Father that even though I was a woman I refused to be overlooked, just as I refused to conform to his expectations of what a woman should look like and how she should act. I proved a most unsuitable Other,’ Lilian chuckled. ‘“Those dangerous enemies of men, called women”.’ [100] She recited her William with lofty good effect.

‘But perhaps not *so* cunning,’ Foucault said, unconvinced. ‘Wasn’t it Albion who proved the more dangerous enemy – raping you, sending you to a mental asylum?’

‘Indeed, he did do those things,’ Lilian said, ‘but in the end Father feared *me* for I exposed his failings, provoked his weaknesses. In “running wild” [101] and making myself too large to beat, hold, move or control, even in the loony bin, I was able to regain power, exert my free will. I defeated Father with my bulk. “You are like a cow, Lilian, sitting fat-uddered on that chair” [102] – that’s what he said to me. It was a great moment. It proved I was immovable – cunningly obstinate – yet womanly still. “[T]here [was] too

much flesh for him" [103] to control,' Lilian said with some satisfaction, 'which freed me to be the woman I wanted to be.'

'And who was that woman?' Barthes asked.

Like Marian, Lilian stopped to consider her female role models before answering Barthes. None were representative of the woman Lilian had chosen for herself. There was Mother – "a woman of pale colours: lilacs and lavenders and the grey of galahs" [104] – who withdrew from Lilian after the pain of her birth then retreated further still into her illnesses, preoccupation with ferry times and ultimately madness. Then there was thin, compassionate but boozy Aunt Kitty, who acknowledged that "If I had only been fat enough, I could have done so much". [105] And the dainty and glamorous Ursula – and other equally dainty and glamorous bourgeois girls at the tennis and croquet parties – was too pretty and not clever enough for the likes of Lil to want to emulate.

'Not someone fragile like Mother,' Lilian said, 'nor thin and afraid like Aunt Kitty. I wanted to be a big and powerful woman, noticed for who I was, not what I wasn't. "[A] woman [who turns] her back on all things women are supposed to want, and invent[s] another set of priorities".' [106]

'Do you believe you have become this woman you desired to?' Foucault asked.

'My journey to find her has often been painful, I grant you that Michel. When I was younger I wanted to hide – to be invisible – but found if difficult to do so in a body of this size.' Lilian spread her arms wide, leaving her front open, vulnerable. 'It was not until I left the loony bin and found my "empire [in] the streets" [107] – my space free from the "confines of institution, home, and family" [108] – that I learnt invisibility was not the way to find this other woman. I went from thinking girls could not be heroes to

discovering that they could – *I* could. I came to celebrate my ample flesh for the authority it lent me.

'My brother John tried to convince me that "There is nothing that matters", [109] that Father did not hate me only that "he thought [I] did not matter". [110] But I believe the opposite, that there is nothing that *does not* matter, [111] not in nature, life and certainly not in being a woman.' Lilian rested her smooth hands in front of her on the table. 'Now,' she said, '"I am ready for whatever comes next".' [112]

Sweets

‘At this point in the meal, Lilian, what should come next is sweets,’ Grace said, slapping the flats of her hands on the table and pushing herself up from her chair. From the refrigerator she brought first a crystal bowl filled high with sunny slices of mango which she placed on the table. She followed this with a large Pyrex dish of baked custard. ‘Dirt pudding – that’s what Pa called this,’ she said, placing the nutmeg topped custard beside the mango. ‘Not a name I imagine you’re familiar with, Anthelme.’

‘Indeed not,’ Brillat-Savarin said, looking sceptically at the austere dessert. ‘But “the empire of taste” [113] is the tongue and not the eye, so I will trust to that, and your impeccable culinary skills demonstrated so far.’

Dessert aside, the author wondered if she could say the same as Lilian: that she was ready for whatever came next. Her journey – like Lilian’s – had travelled along a troubled road. Not that she would dare compare the physical and mental perils of Lilian’s life with her own academic adversities. But she had been presented with similar moments to Lilian’s in which she’d been forced to question her purpose; to look and trust beyond what her tongue already knew.

“What is it all about? [...] How does it all work?” [114] These were questions Lilian had asked her friend Joan about life, to which Joan had replied: “it is all about whatever you like”. [115] This had echoed a conversation the author had often had with herself. *What is it all about? How does it all work?* she’d wondered. And her reply was always: *Why can’t it be whatever it likes?* But like Lilian, the author also knew that unorthodoxy – her

compulsion to do what she liked; to take the road less travelled – was littered with obstacles and difficult decisions.

The first had been to find the courage to discard several thousand words of work. Those early words were ones which had followed orthodoxy; they had tidy headings like *Introduction, Literature Review, Textual Analysis*. But to the author they were the equivalent of a thin Lilian, a married Marian and a dominated Grace; headings and words which trapped the author in a creative straightjacket. And it was only with her decision to press the *Delete* button on them and start over again that the straightjacket was removed.

And yet the author recalled, with some irony now, how her decision *not* to follow the worn path had immediately hurled her into a dark and often lonely wilderness. Sometimes she thought it wasn't the kind of place one should wander in alone – it was too risky; a space she might not just falter in but fail to navigate altogether. She experienced doubts along the way, ones about her ability to successfully combine academic rigour with creative technique. And the paucity of technical precedents failed to encourage her. But then fireflies of light began to appear in the gloom, illuminating her way with words like *practice-led research*, *fictocriticism*, *hybrid genres*. Finally, doors opened and company presented itself, albeit in small, select gatherings, but with a sense that the party was destined to only get bigger.

Brad Haseman appeared first with his *A Manifesto for Performative Research*, [116] followed by his paper exploring the "tightrope" practice-led researchers were forced to walk in order to apply the protocols demanded by a traditional problem-led research framework. [117] Then there was Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's text titled, and about, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* [118] who declared the

relationship between research and creative practice to be "an activity which can appear in a variety of guises" because knowledge itself is "often unstable, ambiguous and multidimensional". [119] Heather Kerr and Amanda Nettelbeck's text exploring the "space between" fiction and criticism opened the way for an understanding of the practice of fictocriticism, a hybrid genre bringing the creative and the critical together to generate a new kind of social text. [120] Or, as Anna Gibbs describes it: a genre that is not "One" but "a meta-discourse in which the strategies of the telling are part of the point of the tale". [121] The author's reading confirmed for her that there existed opportunities for something other than the exegetical canon favoured by the higher education sector, something which did not conform to the existing "empire of taste".

Once the author discovered there was what Anne Brewster called an "alternative method of knowledge production", [122] and that there was even a developing language to describe it – fictocriticism – then the loss of her earlier work seemed like little more than the often-practised act of editing out a superfluous character to a story.

The author thought back to her earlier conversation she'd had with Barthes that day, the one in which he claimed an author to be redundant once a text was in the hands of its reader. She remembered something he'd said at the start of their conversation; something which had resonated with her new understanding of fictocritical writing.

'What did you mean earlier,' she asked him now, 'when you said there was a multiplicity to writing?'

Barthes arranged his spoon neatly in his empty dessert bowl and thought a moment. 'I consider a text to be drawn from many cultures and a variety of writings. The

writer's power lies in being able to "counter the ones with the others, in such a way as to never rest on any one of them". [123] In this way meaning refuses to be fixed.'

'So for me to struggle to define the theoretical framework under which my study falls – to fix it with a definition, a meaning – isn't unexpected? I ask this because sometimes I grapple with what it is I've written. Is it a cultural study in the way it considers the landscape of gendered geography or an anthropological one because it looks at the socio-historical changes to a woman's domestic role? Then I think no, it's psychoanalytical because I've looked at the motivations behind one women's use of guerrilla tactics. But then it all seems to sit under a big protective awning with *feminist theory* written across it like corporate advertising.' The author lifted her hands in a gesture of helplessness.

Barthes laughed. 'Welcome to the world of theory,' he said. 'You have learnt what many of us already know – it is acceptable for the meaning of writing to "blend and crash".' [124]

The author had spent many hours trying to position her work into any one of a number of frameworks like the blue-sky-piece of a jigsaw puzzle, hoping for an exact fit, a home. But what she found was that her puzzle piece, while still blue, was always the wrong shade or shape to allow it to rest perfectly into the piece alongside it. Now, Barthes allowed her to understand that her study was, and was allowed to be, many things.

'You have been called an "exemplary practitioner" of fictocriticism,' [125] she said to Barthes. 'I find examples of this practice in much of your work.' [126-128]

'Fictocriticism; "a way of speaking"; "a mode of performance" [129]; "a 'pieced-together' discourse".' [130] Barthes shrugged. 'Call it what you will. But more important perhaps, is how do you think *your* work fits with this model?'

The author considered this judgement call, chin in hand, before delivering her analysis. 'Parts fit, but not all,' she said. 'The way it blurs the boundaries between philosophy and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity – those elements fit. As does its self-reflexivity, multi-vocality and potential for subverting traditional forms. But I'm less sure about my tendency for an accumulative argument and applying some form of navigational heading – these elements don't seem to conform so well to other examples of fictocriticism I've read. But there is no "blueprint",' [131] the author added, 'or, as Simon Robb says, fictocriticism is a "kind of contamination or pollution of rational academic writing: 'matter out of place'". [132] But this suggests it's a research model still under construction so, with time, maybe it will become matter *in* place.'

Barthes nodded. 'This technique of "thinking through" rather than the text becoming simply a "residue of critical thought" [133] has the potential of making it more than just a hermeneutical exercise. But with regard your self-criticism, consider this: there will be those amongst us instructed by our mothers to wash our hands before eating who remain compelled to continue doing so. The same can be said for pedagogical habits of scholarly hygiene – they can be difficult to unlearn. Perhaps,' Barthes said, 'it is better to focus on my belief that "a text's unity lies not in its origins but in its destination".' [134]

De Certeau picked up on Barthes' last word: *destination*. 'So what had you planned as *your* destination?' he asked the author. 'What is its arrival to mark for you?'

The author thought about *her* destination, *her* purpose and not that of her texts. ‘I set out wanting to do something different,’ she said, ‘something other than conforming to a traditional academic model. But not just for the sake of it. It was more about wanting to test the flexibility of practice-led research, to demonstrate that theory and creativity could coexist and need not be seen as two separate entities. That they could be companions, each informing the other.’

De Certeau rested back in his chair and steepled his fingers before him. ‘So in refusing to conform to traditional pedagogies – to reject *colonisation*, some might say [135] – do you feel your research creativity has been liberated? That you have escaped the academy without leaving it, just as Grace escaped her marriage?’

The author laughed. ‘Michel – are you suggesting I’ve adopted a few guerrilla tactics of my own?’

De Certeau opened his hands to the table, humour playing round the corners of his mouth. ‘If we are to believe Barthes’ claim that it is only with the death of the author that we see the birth of the reader, [136] then I suppose we are obliged to leave it to the reader to make that decision.’

Coffee

The author and Grace sat at the kitchen table, hands warmed by the cups of coffee each held. The table – one now – had been cleared of dirty plates and cutlery, everyone having helped with this task before they'd left.

The author had been silent for some time, watching the contents of her cup as though she expected something to bob to the surface at any moment. Grace watched her watching and thought how tired she looked. 'Hard day at the office?' she asked.

The author laughed. 'My brain feels fit to burst and yet there seems so few pages here to examine a whole life.'

'But you haven't examined a whole life – you've examined a part of it,' Grace said. 'Think of it as an onion – it needs to be peeled to get to its core. Each layer will tell you something you didn't already know, but it won't tell you everything, that's why you need to look to the next layer.'

The author watched as Grace sat up tall in her chair and rested her forearms on the table.

'Come on,' Grace said, 'let's be surgeons – we'll peel my story together and see what we know. I'll go first. For a start, I've learnt that silent wars can be fought in kitchens, but also that there's a possibility of a politics to being a housewife. And I know that domestic rituals, or "doing-cooking", can be used to liberate women, which means that kitchens are anything but boring.' Grace looked pleased. 'Now,' she said, 'your turn.'

The author thought about the conversations she'd had that day. Barthes, Massey, de Certeau, Goffman, Foucault – they'd all brought something to the table; something which had either changed her as a writer or changed the way she thought.

'The first thing I've learnt,' she said to Grace, 'is that a writer can't make any claim on a text once it's in the hands of the reader, which means a story can have many truths.'

'So one person's truth might be another person's lie, or vice versa?' Grace asked.

'Yes,' the author said, 'and that's okay because readers bring their own taste – their own experiences – to a story. I've also learnt that the politics to being a housewife you mentioned can be subverted to create a new doctrine – a new spatial model – especially as the sense of self, or identity, shifts within the domestic space.'

'From dominated to clever tactician,' Grace said.

'Exactly,' the author said. 'Guerrilla tactics – those cunning and opportunistic acts used to defeat a coloniser, but without the tactician necessarily having to *perform* in a certain way for them to succeed. It's more that the dominated becomes Other within her domestic space; she need not be the docile body Foucault suggests.'

'It's any wonder I succeeded with Des,' Grace scoffed.

'But it's because Des *was* like he was that you *did* succeed,' the author said. 'If it wasn't for the certainty he had in his position of power – typifying the homogenised social order – you, as guerrilla tactician, might not have been able to keep your actions covert.'

Grace looked sceptical. 'Not down to luck then?'

'No. Down to strategically executed tactics.'

‘But what of Marian? Lilian?’ Grace asked. ‘*Do* you think Marian rejected her femininity?’

‘No. Only the one Peter and society designed for her. And Lilian – she was a self-defining woman too; she defined herself by her largeness.’

‘What about you?’ Grace asked. ‘What defines you?’

‘As researcher or writer?’

‘Both.’

‘As a writer I’m defined by what interests me. And in your case what interested me was shifting female stereotypes from the expected to the unexpected. As a researcher I’m defined by my need for creativity. And the only way I knew how to meet that need was to bring theory and practice together, to allow them to form a partnership.’

Each woman sat lost in thought, taking sips from her cup. After a moment, Grace said, ‘I lied, you know.’

The author looked at her, puzzled.

‘About the onion. It doesn’t really have a core. It’s all layers. The core is just the first layer around which the rest grows. You can’t make a whole onion without it.’

‘So what did your onion grow around?’ the author asked.

‘A desire for liberation. Yours?’

‘A desire for creative enquiry.’

The author thought about this journey of creative enquiry and realised much of her early focus had been about completing her project; putting her package of knowledge forward. But she had come to learn that to think like that was to believe writing was a task that had an endpoint; that narration was the final word. She now knew that words on

a page were just the beginning, the first layer. So while guerrilla tactics had worked to empower Grace, and the theorists the author had at the table had helped her explain why, other disempowered women might seek alternative options, undertaken in different spatial models. And someone might write their stories demonstrating how; other theorists might be used to explain why. In the end – or the beginning – a writer creates story according to her curiosities and questions but it is up to the reader to peel it to find her own.

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